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Plant Agrees to Safety Features

By Anne Hazard

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Officials of a chemical waste disposal plant near Richmond have changed their tune and now are willing to build safety features so the operation will not pose a pollution threat to the Chickahominy River.

An official of Liquid Waste Disposal Inc. indicated in November that the safety features would be too expensive and that the firm would rather shut down the disposal facility in Hanover County than pay for the necessary construction.

However, the State Water

Control Board is reviewing a Feb. 12 letter in which the firm has indicated willingness to make improvements to contain runoff or spills that might contaminate the ground water or the nearby Chickahominy River.

In fact, the firm never intended to shut down, said Eugene Rilee, president of Liquid Waste Inc. and a former Henrico County supervisor.

THE FIRM OFFICIAL who indicated that "was playing a little poker" to win concessions from the water board for fewer, less costly improvements, Rilee said.

Furthermore, the state strongly opposes any shut down of the waste disposal operation because of a severe shortage of such facilities for the dumping of industrial waste, Rilee said.

The facility, located a quarter mile off Richfood Road west of U.S. 301 near Mechanicsville, is referred to by water board records as a "hazardous waste-handling facility."

Although it has been in operation since 1971, the water board did not become aware of its existence until 1977.

While water board officials say it is the only chemical waste disposal facility in eastern Virginia, Rilee says it is probably one of the few such facilities on the East Coast.

Flammable liquid wastes, including sludge from oil tanks, ether from hospitals, ink waste from printing plants and chromic acid wastes, are

brought in by truck, pumped into an 18,000-gallon storage tank, agitated, then pumped into an incinerator and burned.

The facility "is poorly sited in a flood plain" and poses serious water pollution threats, according to water board records.

The facility is located next to a drainage ditch that runs into an unnamed tributary of the Chickahominy River.

RILEE MAINTAINS that if the firm had not handled the several million gallons of flammable waste incinerated at the site since 1971, the material "would have gone in a landfill, in a stream, [or] onto roadways, all of which [are] illegal."

"We really ought to be praised," he said.

In 1977, the firm was ordered to stop dumping wastes into the Henrico sewage treatment system after a small amount of phenol, a hazardous substance, was found in the system.

Last spring, the firm was reprimanded after a resident's complaint resulted in discovery of a small spill of what appeared to be red ink solvent, and about 60 barrels, some empty and some full of chemical wastes, that had been left outside the chain-link fence around the storage tank and incinerator.

Rilee maintains that these incidents have been blown out of proportion and that water board orders to improve safety have been followed.

Waste-handling facilities such as Liquid Waste Disposal must apply for a permit from

the water board. The permit enables the board to require structures to ensure that a spill is contained and won't reach streams and rivers.

In September 1978 the water board began trying to get Rilee's firm to apply for the permit so the construction of a berm around the incinerator and storage tank could be required.

The firm applied in May 1979. State and firm officials have said the delay was partly due to an anticipated relocation by the firm which never took place.

Rilee's Feb. 12 letter to the water board included an outline of the proposed improvements to contain spills or runoff. The design for the improvements was supposed to have been submitted by Dec. 10.

WATER OFFICIALS have complained repeatedly that the firm missed or sought an extension of the deadline to submit plans as well as reports of what materials it handles.

The possibility of threatening enforcement action, then relenting if the documents were received, was discussed by water board officials earlier this year.

This proved unnecessary when the Feb. 12 letter arrived, said J. Kenneth Bailey, director of the division of applied technology for the water board's Piedmont regional office.

"We try to work with the people and get them to comply voluntarily," he said. "It's just a slow process."

Pat Corbett
Thought you'd like to know.

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